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SUBJECT: GOE ENDEAVORS TO MODIFY INTEGRATION PROGRAMS IN  
WAKE OF APRIL RIOTS

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¶1. (U) Summary. In a post Bronze Soldier riot Estonia, integration of ethnic Russians is a hot topic. Once regarded as having one of the most successful post-Soviet integration programs, the GOE is now being forced to take a hard look at the deep fissures that still exist within Estonia's population. Integration will reportedly be a top priority in the next budget, and program focal points will likely look beyond language-based initiatives. The GOE is conducting surveys and talking with focus groups to figure out how to best update and rework its integration programs. Meanwhile, plans to introduce Estonian-language classes in Russian-speaking high schools this fall are moving forward as scheduled. Combating Russian state propaganda remains a big challenge; however, most believe a dedicated GOE Russian-language television station is unrealistic. End Summary.

#### BROAD POLICY SHIFTS EXPECTED

¶2. (U) In 2000, the GOE approved the "State Integration Program for 2000-2007," which called for reducing the number of Estonia's stateless residents, a "substantial" breakthrough in teaching Estonian to Russian-speakers and full participation of non-Estonians in all levels of society. Although Estonia's integration programs have achieved notable successes, April's Bronze Soldier riots brought to light the deep fissures that remain between ethnic Estonians and Russian-speakers. As dialogues concerning follow up on the "State Integration Program for 2008-2013" continue in the wake of the riots, integration discussions generally are taking on a higher profile and are reaching beyond the Ministry of Education and Research (MOE) and the office of the Minister for Population Affairs. For example, in early July, the City of Tallinn - governed by the Center Party, which has actively cultivated Estonia's Russian-speakers - held the second part of a two-part "Domestic Peace" program entitled "The Need for an Integration Program in Tallinn." Discussions focused on the need to draw up a Tallinn-specific program to ensure security and stability, promote mutual understanding and encourage peace in the city. Integration has been a common theme in the Ambassador's meetings with GOE officials, and a number of sources indicate that integration will be a top priority in next year's budget.

¶3. (U) At a recent roundtable of national minority representatives, Population Minister Urve Palo explicitly stated that the government is planning big changes to its integration policy and programs. Tanel Matlik, Director of the Non-Estonians' Integration Foundation (NEIF), further stated that it is clear the existing Estonian language-based integration plan has not produced the desired results. He emphasized that the new program must "bring integration to the masses." In her effort to formulate a new program, the Population Minister has commissioned

population research, surveys and expert focus groups including participants from Tartu University, The Baltic Studies Institute, the Praxis and Geomedia research companies, the PR company Hill & Knowlton and a group of Tallinn University social scientists led by Professor Raivo Vetik. These experts are analyzing multiple aspects of Estonian society and will submit an action plan and integration strategy to the GOE by the end of the year.

14. (SBU) While work on the new strategies is ongoing, Post has observed several common themes emerging in the media and through conversations with officials. These themes include: building a national identity, integration as a "two-way street," and seeking to understand people's motivations.

#### BUILDING A NATIONAL IDENTITY

15. (SBU) Future GOE integration programs will likely focus less on language - teaching Estonian to Russian-speakers - and more on building a common state identity. The Advisor to Population Minister Palo, Eduard Odinets, told us that it has become clear that identity building and social integration must play a bigger role. He said his office is working to develop specific programs to identify common points between cultures as a basis for dialogue. He was careful not to find fault with previous programs, instead stating that times have changed and old programs need to be revised. As an example, Odinets highlighted the term "non-Estonian" as having negative connotations, noting it is vital for people to realize that being an Estonian is not an issue of ethnicity, but rather an issue of nationality.

16. (SBU) NEIF Director Matlik told us that his organization has requested a 30 per cent budget increase from the GOE to continue and enhance programs aimed at

building a common state identity among ethnic Russians who make up the bulk of Estonia's minority population. (Note. We expect the government is likely to agree to this increase. End Note.) Specifically, he pointed to programs that provide Russian children with opportunities to interact with ethnic Estonians and visit Estonian state institutions to learn more about Estonia's history and political system. In addition, exchange programs in which ethnic Russian children live with an Estonian family for a period of time are increasingly popular both for their language and cultural benefits. These exchanges provide children the opportunity to dispel old stereotypes for themselves. As one official pointedly told us, not all Russians drink vodka and not all Estonians wear traditional clothing and eat smoked fish.

#### INTEGRATION AS A TWO-WAY STREET

17. (SBU) Another common theme is the idea that successful integration must be a "two-way street." Until now, most ethnic Estonians saw integration as a process whereby Russians became more like them. At the same time, most ethnic-Estonians still have great difficulty with the concept that non-ethnic Estonians can be good citizens of Estonia. Commenting on this now popular phrase, Population Advisor Odinets emphasized the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding. He gave the example of teacher training programs, which are currently conducted separately for Russian and Estonian-speaking schools. Odinets has advised Population Minister Palo that common training programs - even if they required the use of translators - would give teachers from different backgrounds a better understanding of both their differences and their similarities and help them find common ground. He noted that Estonians need to understand that they cannot detach Russians from themselves - that Russian-Estonians are a part of Estonian society.

18. (SBU) Odinets identified the police as a positive example of ethnic Russians and Estonians working together harmoniously. Conversely, he described the cultural events

that frequently take place to highlight Estonia's various ethnic groups, noting that these events are rarely attended by anyone outside of the particular ethnic group being featured. Odinetz suggested tying state funding of these kinds of activities to the involvement of outside groups. In a separate meeting, MP and former Minister of Education Peeter Kreitzberg, a Social Democrat, emphasized that ethnic Russians cannot be expected to renounce their Russian heritage. At the same time, he continued, the idea of two state languages (Estonian and Russian) is unacceptable. He believes that while cultural understanding on both sides is important, having one common language is vital for educational and professional opportunities.

#### WHY THEY DO WHAT THEY DO: UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS

¶9. (SBU) Shortly after the riots, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves stated that unfortunately many Estonians think of Russians as looters and rioters. Population Minister Palo has also noted the danger in this type of thinking. Population Advisor Odinetz further noted that sometimes things have to get worse before they can get better, and he is hopeful that the riots at least brought certain issues to light that can no longer be ignored. One of the focus groups initiated by the Office of Population Affairs is studying the questions surrounding the motivations of ethnic groups and possible programs to help people learn to better understand one another.

#### RUSSIAN SCHOOL LANGUAGE REFORM PROGRAM ON TRACK

¶10. (SBU) Although the GOE is looking to expand beyond its emphasis on language-based integration, the MOE is moving forward with plans to phase in Estonian language classes at Russian high schools - grades 10-12 - this fall. Katri Raik, Deputy General Secretary for the MOE, told us that all of Estonia's 63 Russian-language high schools are ready to go forward with the first phase: teaching Estonian literature in Estonian. The phase-in program will add additional Estonian-language courses to the curriculum each year: Civics (2008), Music and Art History (2009), Geography (2010), and Estonian History (2011). In addition to fulfilling the minimum requirements, MOE Deputy Raik noted that starting this fall about half of Russian-language schools will teach physical education classes in Estonian, and a third will teach music in Estonian.

¶11. (U) A major concern with the Russian-language school reform continues to be the availability of teachers who can teach fluently in both Russian and Estonian. This is of particular concern in the heavily-populated Russian areas

in north-eastern Estonia. To address the bilingual teacher deficit, Education Minister Lukas plans to launch an extensive program to increase the number of Estonian-speaking teachers at Russian-language secondary schools. For example, the GOE will award ethnic Estonian teachers approximately \$17,000 after one year of teaching in a Russian-language school. Meanwhile, teachers without the requisite knowledge of Estonian fear losing their jobs. MOE Deputy Raik largely dismissed this problem, pointing out that many unilingual Russian teachers are near retirement age, and younger teachers are taking Estonian language classes in addition to their regular workloads to prepare them to teach in Estonian. Whether these teachers will ultimately be adequately equipped to teach class in Estonian is unclear.

¶12. (SBU) While Estonia's Russian-speaking population seems to have more or less accepted the idea of language reforms in their schools, there is still some pushback. MOE Deputy Raik noted this, emphasizing the need for more information for students, their parents and teachers, and better "packaging" of the program and its benefits. She indicated to us that she plans to personally travel to Russian-language schools to promote and better explain the program.

¶13. (SBU) MP Kreitzberg, a former Education Minister himself, told us that he thinks the language integration program is all wrong. Instead of focusing on high schools, he said the GOE should concentrate on the pre-school, primary, and basic school levels. The ideal solution, Kreitzberg noted, would be for ethnic Russian students to know Estonian well enough to study in all-Estonian high schools. This would eliminate the need for Russian-language schools altogether and facilitate social integration. However, Population Minister Palo has been careful to point out that a full transition to Estonian-language education in Russian high schools has never been considered by her office.

#### THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING HISTORY

¶14. (SBU) One key issue made clear by the April riots is that Estonia's ethnic Estonian and Russian populations still have very different interpretations of history. GOE officials have emphasized to us that countering misconceptions among Russian-speaking residents is one of the biggest challenges it faces with respect to integration. NEIF Director Matlik compared teaching history in some Russian-language schools today to teaching the history of the Communist Party in Soviet times - when people studied what they were told to study but did not believe it. He noted that while most teachers in Estonia's Russian-language schools are loyal to Estonia and use state-authorized texts, some are having trouble leaving the past behind. Many may be intentionally or unintentionally leaning toward the old Soviet view of history. Director Matlik pointed out that this problem is compounded in some ethnic-Russian homes as parents give their children less-than-accurate takes on history. (Note. Teachers can choose among a variety of texts, but all must be approved by the government. However, teachers have a great deal of flexibility in choosing "supplemental" information for their courses. One significant concern is that teachers in Russian-language schools use materials from Russian Federation newspapers and other less-than-objective sources. End Note.)

#### RUSSIAN YOUTH DEVELOPING IDENTITY: AMONG MOST INTEGRATED ACCORDING TO SOME

¶15. (SBU) MP Kreitzerberg explained that Estonia's young ethnic Russians have a new identity, separate from Russians living in Russia and the older "Soviet" generation living in Estonia. He believes that ethnic Russians are increasingly western-oriented, and went so far as to say that most of the problems associated with the riots will disappear on their own within 50 years. Despite the youth-oriented nature of the riots, both Population Minister Advisor Odinets and MP Kreitzerberg believe that, as a whole, Estonia's youth are among the most integrated segment of the population. Population Minister Advisor Odinets believes that young people are the most likely to see the benefits of integration, i.e., learning to speak Estonian and doing well on exams will result in better employment opportunities. Further, young people realize that obtaining Estonian citizenship means being able to live and work elsewhere in the EU. (Note. Stateless persons who are resident in Estonia can travel in the EU without a visa starting this year; however, they are not entitled to the same work and residency privileges as Estonian citizens. End Note.) In fact, MP Kreitzerberg stressed that unless Estonia is especially accommodating to its young Russian

population, they will eventually lose them to western Europe.

#### RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE MEDIA: FIGHTING THE PROPAGANDA WAR

¶16. (U) Russia's ability to influence Estonia's Russian-speaking population during the riots highlighted the fact that most Russian-speakers in Estonia get their news directly from Moscow. (Reftel) During the riots, Russia

was able to manipulate and inflame ethnic Russians through television and other media outlets, easily countering Estonian-based news reports.

¶17. (U) Although locally-produced Russian-language television is available in Estonia, programming is limited and there is no single dedicated channel. Meanwhile, a wide variety of Russia-based programming is readily available via cable television. Russia's propaganda push leading up to and following the April riots renewed discussions about the importance of reaching out to Estonia's Russian-speaking population. Countering the propaganda issuing from Russia will be an especially important challenge in the years to come.

¶18. (U) The possibility of creating a GOE-funded Russian-language channel has been considered, but largely deemed implausible due to high costs and competition. Estonia's Russian speakers - who watch an average of more than four hours of television a day - report that Russian Federation TV stations have an advantage over local programming because they offer better entertainment. These programs draw viewers who are then more likely to stay tuned for the Russia-based news in lieu of changing channels. Others are thinking about more creative solutions. Kadri Liik, Director of Tallinn's International Center for Defense Studies, told us that instead of starting an independent channel, the GOE could alternatively buy air time on already popular Russian stations. When we asked her why the Russian stations would agree to this arrangement, Liik replied that their ability to air programming in Estonia could be hinged on such an agreement.

¶19. (SBU) Comment. In an effort to support the integration process, Post plans to continue to participate in events that promote integration both locally and through our regional outreach program. We will continue to monitor the dialogue on the topic and the evolution of integration programs in Estonia, including the development of the "State Integration Program for 2008-2013." While the Bronze Soldier riots have generated a lot of discussion, only time will tell if these discussions will produce tangible results. End Comment.

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